

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

BERTA CÁCERES

Environmental organizer leader, Indigenous Rights activist

"Democracy needs to be exercised as a horizontal power, built by the people, and defined by their participation not just in terms of their numbers but rather through their actual participation."

Page | 1



COURTESY OF TIM RUSSO AND FRONT-LINE DEFENDERS

Background Information

Born March 4, 1971; Died March 2, 2016

Cáceres, from the Lenca indigenous group predominant in Southwestern Honduras, was born in La Esperanza, Honduras.ⁱ She grew up during civil unrest and violence in Central America during the 1980s caused by foreign intervention from the United States.ⁱⁱ Cáceres's journey as a social activist was influenced mainly by her mother, who housed and cared for El Salvadorian refugees.ⁱⁱⁱ Cáceres attended university, where she co-founded the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH) and organized campaigns focused on social and indigenous issues.^{iv}

Cáceres's Resistance

In 2006, a group of Lenca people asked Cáceres to investigate who brought construction equipment to their area of Rio Blanco. Cáceres uncovered the source: dam developers.^v She found that the government approved the project without consulting the Lenca people. The dam's construction project violated the Lenca people's rights because it was built upon the sacred Gualcaruq River, which is an essential space to the spirituality and livelihood of the Lenca people.^{vi} Cáceres protested in a variety of ways over seven years, including filing complaints to government officials, organizing a local assembly, and leading a protest.^{vii} Local leaders ignored each appeal and continued the project by coercing people through deceitful and manipulative tactics.^{viii} In April 2013, Cáceres and the Lenca people carefully organized a peaceful road blockade to prevent the companies from accessing the river.^{ix} Armed military, state, and security forces violently removed, discredited, and killed protestors and community leaders. Through continued community-led efforts, the project's construction halted in 2013.^x However, Cáceres still received death threats from project funders, and was ultimately assassinated in 2016.^{xi}

Achievements

Cáceres has received awards for her activism, including the Goldman Prize.^{xii} Her life activism highlights how environmental issues are intertwined with human rights issues. These issues cannot separate from the most impacted people like the Lenca Indigenous people. Her life work with COPINH directly challenged the current capitalistic system, state, and actors, whose response was violence and death.

Essential Questions

1. Cáceres and the Lenca people created a community-led organizing effort that brought about transformative change. Although the group's efforts were led peacefully, they were continually met with strong government resistance, arrests, threats, and violence.
 - a. Why do you think organizers continue protests despite real threats of violence?

2. Cáceres created a social activism organization, COPINH (Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras), to support Indigenous People's territorial rights, lives, and community livelihoods by organizing campaigns. What are some social justice issues that matter to you? What organizations support these issues?

3. ***“Democracy needs to be exercised as a horizontal power, built by the people, and defined by their participation not just in terms of their numbers but rather through their actual participation.”***
 - a. What does this quote mean to you?
 - b. Do you agree or disagree with her position? Why?

ⁱ “Berta Cáceres.” In *Wikipedia*, November 23, 2021.
https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Berta_C%C3%A1ceres&oldid=1056721427.

ⁱⁱ “Berta Cáceres,” November 23, 2021

ⁱⁱⁱ “Berta Cáceres,” November 23, 2021

^{iv} “Berta Cáceres,” November 23, 2021

^v “Berta Cáceres”

^{vi} “Berta Cáceres”

^{vii} Berta Cáceres”

^{viii} “Berta Cáceres”

^{ix} “Berta Cáceres”

^x “Berta Cáceres”

^{xi} University, Santa Clara. “Berta Cáceres.” <https://www.scu.edu/environmental-ethics/environmental-activists-heroes-and-martyrs/bera-caceres.html>.

^{xii} “Berta Cáceres”